

CATS Newsletter

Vol. 14 No. 1
May, June, July,
August 1996

The Capital Area
Timex/Sinclair Users
Group



Cyber-Satellites and Web DXing

by George Wood

Nowadays you can use the Net to watch live video from the space shuttle, listen to radio stations around the world live, view WEFAX images from weather satellites, or find the latest news about new TV satellites and programs. George Wood, who's been putting "Sweden Calling DXers" and "MediaScan" online for the past ten years, explains what's waiting in Cyberspace.

Right now I'm listening to KOA-AM 850 kHz in Denver. No big deal, almost anybody in North America can probably listen to KOA any evening on their car or portable radio. But I'm in Sweden, and I listened to the live broadcast over the Internet on my PC. A little while ago, I used my computer to watch video of a space shuttle mission from NASA Select TV.

There's a lot out there in Cyberspace.

Back in the mid-80's, when Radio Sweden hosted the annual conference of the European DX Council, we started what was to become a tradition, the workshop on Computers in DXing. Those were exciting times. I'd just gotten my first modem, and I was desperately trying to get it to work during the conference. Soon afterward Radio Sweden began publishing The DXers Guide to Computing. The publication outlined all the ways computers could be used to aid the radio listening hobby.

The Guide soon grew from a couple of pages to more than 50, and the chapters stabilized around a few basic applications: programs for logging and satellite tracking; decoding digital modes like RTTY, WEFAX, SSTV, and packet; computer control of receivers; and exchanging information over computer bulletin boards or online systems like CompuServe.

There things have largely remained. The programs have gotten bigger, better, and faster as the computers have improved. Programs have integrated, so you can use one package now to control virtually any suitable receiver, decode packet or RTTY, and keep track of your logs. But this has just been a gradual improvement in existing applications.

Enter the Internet

But in the last couple of years things have changed radically, as the global computer network of networks—the Internet, has grown from being the backwater of academics and defence contractors to a new communications medium for any company and any individual. Today you can use the Net to exchange electronic messages with other hobbyists, follow news and help

each other in online conferences, get information directly from organizations and broadcasters on their Web pages, and even listen to radio from around the world, or watch video from above it.

The most important development has been the World Wide Web, a way of creating "pages" of information carrying not just text, but also images and sound. Through mouse-clickable links you can move like Alice falling through the rabbit hole from one page to other pages, which can be from the same source or from another computer around the world, a seamless network to explore and investigate, or Net surf.

Some Basics

Internet access is divided into three levels. Level 1 is simple electronic mail, or e-mail. It's a great advantage to be able to send a message to someone instantly, and have it waiting there for them to read when they want to. It's especially useful when communicating across time zones, and couples the speed of the telephone with the convenience of ordinary letters.

E-mail has been around for some time, initially over bulletin boards and through online systems like CompuServe and America Online. But with BBS's and online systems connecting to the Internet, it's now possible to reach 30 or 40 million people around the world with e-mail, without worrying which service they subscribe to. Of course the hard part is knowing your friends' e-mail addresses. Sometimes the easiest way is to just call up and ask!

E-mail can be a very useful tool. Recently Karl Miosga of the

From the Editor:

CATS is moving back to New Carrollton!

CATS' chatty meetings will continue, with New Carrollton once again the venue.

Welcome back! Bob Diggs has been dealing with his heart again. He's left a note at the CATS e-mail box letting us know that he's "back on the air."

Do things seem a little light?

There's a reason - nothing in, nothing out! (Thanks for the nice article last issue, Barry!)

World Radio Network and I arranged the relay of Radio Sweden's Swedish service over WRN2 on Galaxy 5 to North America, completely using e-mail. For several years now e-mail contributions to MediaScan/Sweden Calling DXers have outnumbered letters, with the advantage of being much more timely, and capable of being loaded directly into word processing programs without my having to do a lot of retyping.

E-mail is also used for mailing lists, either one-way newsletters like Tele-satellit or my own MediaScan, or lists where anyone can send in a contribution, and all the messages are sent either individually or gathered together in a daily compilation to everyone on the list. You subscribe (for free) to a mailing list by sending a message to a particular e-mail address, sometimes with certain key words in the subject line or the body of the message. Usually you get a message back welcoming you to the list, and it contains the all-important information on how to remove yourself from the list, should it not turn out to be what you expected.

Level 2 consists mainly of the so-called newsgroups of the Usenet, a complementary network to the Internet. The name is misleading, newsgroups are not really about news, but are rather ongoing online conferences, similar to the HamNet Forum on CompuServe or the SWL Echo on Fidonet. What is astounding is their number. The last time I checked there were more than fourteen thousand newsgroups. They range from esoteric computer languages and Net development, and hobbies like raising pets and favorite TV shows like Star Trek, to the infamous handful of sex groups that the press loves to write about.

There aren't that many newsgroups carrying pornography, but they do exist. It isn't easy to just stumble into them, and it takes some doing to actually view images, as they are encoded. There are also commercial programs parents can install on their systems that can screen out offensive areas of the Internet so

children can't gain access to these groups.

There are a number of newsgroups of interest to radio hobbyists. Living in Europe, my favorite is alt.satellite.tv.europe. When I want to know what is happening in radio back home in the San Francisco Bay Area, I check out ba.broadcast. See the box for a list of relevant newsgroups about radio and television.

Level 3 is the Worldwide Web itself. The Web was created in 1991 by Tim Berners-Lee at the European Particle Physics Laboratory CERN, to make information on the Internet more accessible. Initially it was text-based, and you navigated through it with the cursor keys on your keyboard. The text included hyperlinks, underlined words you could click on (by hitting the right cursor key), which would take you to another document on another Web page, anywhere in the world.

The big break-through came a couple of years ago at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Marc Andreessen designed NCSA Mosaic, the first graphic-based program, or "browser", to access the Web. Initially available only for UNIX workstations running X-Windows, the NCSA eventually developed Windows and Macintosh versions of the program, and best of all, made them available for free over the Net.

Suddenly the dull text-based Web was full of colorful images and sounds! As more and more people discovered the Net, major corporations realized the potential, and starting building their own Web sites, initially for advertising their products, but with an eye for the eventual introduction of mail order-type commerce.

Marc Andreessen left the NCSA, and together with Jim Clarke of Silicon Graphics, founded Netscape, which currently produces the best and most popular Web Net browser.

To Be Continued

The next two meetings of CATS will be held on: July 13

and ... August 10, 1996

2:00 PM General meeting

At: New Carrollton Public Library

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